CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

The British administration in Naga Hills lasted for seven decades. This period witnessed unprecedented socio-political changes in the history of the Nagas, for it was for the first time in the annals of their history that the Nagas were brought under an alien rule.

The British Imperial policy towards the Nagas was basically the outcome of the necessity to protect their interests in the administered areas of Assam. Viewed from the contemporary colonial interest, it appears that the British had no immediate socio-economic or political allurement in Naga Hills which otherwise would have attracted their attention to this area soon after its occupation of Assam. The long and protracted Anglo-Naga relations roughly from the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 to the late 1870's reveal British reluctance to extend their administration to Naga Hills.

The reasons for the slow process of bringing the Nagas under settled British administration may be attributed to a number of factors: the first was the absence of a strong economic incentive; second was the financial constraint on the administration of the District. Thirdly,
there was no rival power in the region to threaten the Naga, and thus there was hardly any geo-political consideration for imposing British control over the Nagas.

Fourthly, although the Nagas continued to pose a frontier problem causing havoc on the British subjects on the border, they did not at the same time pose a threat to the security of British India. The British could thus occasionally counter-attack the Nagas implicated in the border raids and inflict summary punishments on them by burning their villages, destroying their field crops, imposing fines and imprisonment and indulging in killings. Their goal in controlling the Nagas was to secure peace on the border. At the same time, the entire history of their early relations with the Nagas shows a slow, reluctant but inevitable advance which ultimately led them to establish their rule in Naga Hills. Thus speaking of the extension of British rule in Naga Hills, B.C. Allen, the writer of the Gazetteer of Assam, wrote: "It should be premised that for the annexation of their territory the Nagas are themselves responsible. The cost of the administration of the District is out of all proportion to the revenue that is obtained, and we only occupied the hills after a bitter experience extending over many
years, which clearly showed that annexation was the only way of preventing raids upon our villages. ¹

It took more than five decades for the British to finally consolidate their rule in Naga Hills. In their bid to bring the tribes under control, Britain made strenuous efforts and, in doing so, incurred loss of many lives including some of her best civilian officers.

During the period of effective administration (1881-1947), the tribes which were fighting in defence of their freedom were subdued and the relation of the ruler and the ruled developed. The Nagas gradually accepted the unavoidable situation and became by and large loyal subjects of the British. Consequently the Nagas volunteered and fought in both the World Wars alongside the British.

The British followed an intelligent policy towards the Nagas. The nature of colonial administration in the district was founded on a convenient basis, suitable both to the ruled and the ruler. It did not try to impose a European or British India model of administration.

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So long as the colonial interests and law and order were maintained, they left existing native institutions undisturbed, especially if they did not conflict with colonial policy or interests. The village headman was made the direct means of communication between the village and the district officers whereas the people themselves were made responsible for their own policing. This at the same time reduced the financial and other commitment of the Government to the administration of the Naga Hills. It also made British rule more acceptable to the Nagas. Very significant in this respect was the role of the Dobashis who acted as Naga intermediaries between the Nagas and the British rulers.

The British limited its administrative role to the essential limit of maintenance of law and order having the detailed local administration to the native leaders. Nagas continued to rule and administer their villages according to their respective customs with very 'loose control' by the Government. Obviously the secret of success of British administration lay in their minimum interference in the internal affairs of the Nagas. At the same time, certain byproducts of British rule followed: the development of road communications, introduction of Christianity and modern education, promotion of public health, and the levy of house tax.
However, it may be noted that the British rulers
did not administer the Nagas as a philanthropic mission
rather, this policy suited the best interests of colonialism.

The other distinguishing feature of colonial
administration in Naga Hills was that of the partition
of Naga inhabited areas into various administrative units.
This problem remains to date as a legacy of British
colonialism in Naga Hills. To this day, Nagaland is
divided into different areas within Burma, Manipur, Assam,
Arunachal Pradesh and mainland Nagaland and the Nagas
continue to demand integration of Naga inhabited areas
into a single unit. At the same time, colonial rule
also led to a certain cohesion of the Naga tribes as an
ethnic group and the awakening of a certain political
consciousness.

With the introduction of British rule, headhunting
became a thing of the past and in its place a harmonious
relationship began to develop among the then warring
tribes. The spirit of reconciliation became apparent
by the absence of further internecine conflicts in the
district.

So far as cultural aspect of British policy were
concerned, native culture, eventhough deprootted, could
not continue as before because of incompatibility of some of its demands with the norms of British administration. The practice of headhunting which was associated with native belief as a source of dynamism and productivity had no place under the British regime. On the whole, along with headhunting, other social evils such as minor child marriage, slave trade and human sacrifice were brought to an end.

The British did however encourage the preservation of some other elements of native culture. In particular they tried to isolate the Naga society from Assam and other parts of India. In general their cultural policy towards the Nagas was characterised by great caution and reluctance to interfere with their customs and beliefs, and whatever changes were sought to be introduced were introduced slowly and indirectly. This policy appears to have a mixed impact on the Nagas. Because of this cultural isolationist policy, the Nagas could preserve many of their indigenous customs and yet at the same time receive western influences through the limited avenues of interaction. However, western and colonial culture did gradually impinge on the Nagas.

The gradual assimilation of the alien culture was effected through education and Christianity leading
undue encouragement to the propagation of the gospel, its connection with the christian missionaries was undeniable, and the Government did give protection and moral support to the missionaries. Despite the fact that respect for the national-cultural sentiments of the colonial people formed a part of British colonial policy, they introduced christianity in places like Naga Hills where it ultimately brought about immense socio-political transformation of the natives.

Western education which was at first introduced by the christian missionaries played the role of both an eyeopener as well as that of upliftment among the Naga tribes destitute of literacy. The Naga response to the new learning was quite positive.

The study of colonial economic policy in Naga Hills reveals that although Britain showed keen interest in exploiting the economic resources of the district, it could not go far in that direction. While some attempts were made for the exploitation of natural resources such as tea, coffee, coal, timber, etc., no effective measures were taken for the development of these resources. Thus the resources of the district remained undeveloped. Accordingly, the main source of revenue of the district continued to be the annual house tax.
inevitably to the erosion of Naga culture. For change and erosion were inseparable. As for instance, when confronted with the christian gospel, the Nagas accepted it and simultaneously discarded animism, their own traditional religion. Such concessions to foreign socio-religious culture not only facilitated but also accelerated the pace of change in Naga community. However, the tendency towards rapid changeover was checked by the Government's policy of cultural protectionism which literally strove to maintain cultural status-quo. This policy tended to play a counter-balancing role via-a-vis both extremes.

However, in time acceptance of Christianity made them more and more amenable to western culture. Assimilation of western culture in the form of Christian principles also led them to be more obedient and loyal to the British, instead of making them independent minded. This is obvious from the fact that during the British rule there was no large scale organised anti-colonial resistance within the district.

The most revolutionary and abiding impact on the Naga cultural ethos was made by the American christian missionaries. In fact, it should be noted that culturally Naga Hills became a colony of American evangelism. For although British Government did not perhaps give any
Some efforts were made to develop agriculture, but not much was accomplished. The Government tried to restrict jhum cultivation and encourage terraced cultivation, and the latter did make some progress. However, ploughing of fields remained relatively unknown in the Naga Hills. The Government also offer incentives for the extension of agriculture in Naga Hills through grant of loans, employment of trained agricultural demonstrators. But such incentives remained paltry and the progress of agriculture was practically very little.

Though there was a certain acceleration of the tempo of trade, trading activities in the district were limited to a few native products because of the undeveloped character of its economy and their transaction was mostly confined to the barter system. The volume of trade was also low and it was limited to intervillage trade and some of the inhabitants of the border areas of Assam. The trade within the district was monopolised by a handful of people mostly non-indigenous residents of the district. The Marwari and Muhammadan traders were the first business groups who settled in the Naga Hills; in fact their appearance in the district was itself another facet of
the impact of British colonialism. These traders came to the Hills on the heels of British colonialism and partly by taking the assistance of the Government.

The British broke the 'splendid' isolation of the Nagas and incorporated them in their system of administration. Within the bounds of their administration, the British succeeded in maintaining law and order. Their administration provided the needed security to the tribes who during the pre-colonial period lived in a hostile and insecure atmosphere. The dawn of colonial administration was, in fact, the beginning of peaceful co-existence among the tribes of Naga Hills. Moreover, it was under the impact of colonial administration that the tribes were drawn together and began to identify themselves as Nagas. This slow but gradual awareness of modern politics significantly shaped their common Naga political outlook and was subsequently manifested in the formation of Naga Club in 1918 later culminating in the formation of Naga National Council in March 1946.

While the British administration achieved the maintenance of law and order in Naga Hills, introduced in it modern means of communication and modern education and united the chronically disintegrated tribes into a distinct people, the pattern of British administration